Message of Qur’an

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Al-Qur'an, the Word of God, is inimitable and unsurpassable not only in the grandeur of its diction, the variety of its imagery and the splendour of its word painting, but also in its meaning, substance, message and profundity. It is "an incomparable book which yields to no abrogation or distortion, and unto which no falsehood could find a way from whatever source, be it of past or future events mentioned therein, a message from the Wise Lord to whom praise is due for the bounties He has bestowed on mankind." (*Al-Baidawy -- Commentary of the Qur'an*). It is neither a history nor a biography. It is not even an anthology, or metaphysical dialectic, or sublime homiletic. It is not poetry either in spite of its rhythm and cadence and its captivating charm. It is much more than all that. It is the Revelation of God, the undoubted Guidance for mankind, with a universal and eternal meaning and substance. It proclaims the common source of religions and confirms and completes the earlier Revelations.

> *Now hath come unto you light from God and a plain Scripture whereby Allah guideth him who seeketh His good pleasure unto paths of peace. He bringeth them out of darkness unto light by His decree, and guideth them unto a straight path* [Qur'an 5:16]

The Divine Origin of the Qur'an

> *This is the scripture whereof there is no doubt, a Guidance unto those who ward off (evil).* [Qur'an 2:2]
> *A Book which We have revealed unto thee (Muhammad) that thereby thou mayst bring forth mankind from darkness unto light, by the permission of their Lord, unto the path of the Exalted in power, Worthy of Praise*. [Qur'an 14:1]
> *And, those who are endowed with knowledge, can see that the Revelation sent down to thee, O Muhammad, from thy Lord is the Truth; and that it guides people to the path of the Exalted, Worthy of all Praise*. [Qur'an 34:6]

The Qur'an itself testifies that its author is God Himself. It is never the Prophet who speaks in the Qur'an. The scripture addresses him directly or refers to him in the third person. Its literary style and diction are altogether different from the sayings of the Prophet which have been preciously preserved. If ever the Prophet slightly faltered or hesitated, the revelation pulled him up. For instance, when the Prophet was annoyed at the interruption of a blind man while he was in conversation with a Quraish noble (8:1-2) or when he forbade to himself a thing which God had made lawful. On numerous occasions when he was confronted with some baffling problems, he had to wait for revelations to appear. To those who doubt its Divine origin, the Qur'an throws a challenge. It asks them first to imitate its full text, or even to produce ten *surahs* similar to those in the Qur'an or to create but a single similar *surah* and finally a *surah* even slightly resembling one in the Qur'an. The gravity of the challenge can best be appreciated if it is remembered that there are some *surahs* in the Qur'an which are but one line. The challenge was not limited to the people of the age of the Qur'an's revelation; it is open for all times.

Qur'an, the Word of God, is not only inimitable in the profundity of its contents and message, but also in the grandeur of its diction, the variety of its imagery and the splendour of its word painting. Its literary form and style surpasses the powers of man and defies imitation. An appraisal of its literary form made by AI-Azhar University runs as follows :

- The form of the Qur'an neither reflects the sedentary softness of the townsmen nor the nomadic toughness of the Bedouin. It possesses in right measure the sweetness of the former and the vigour of the latter.
- The rhythm of the syllables more sustained than in prose and less patterned than in poetry. The pauses come, neither in prose form nor in the manner of poetry, but with a different harmonious and rhythmic symmetry.
- The words chosen neither transgress by their banality nor by their extreme rarity but are recognized as expressing admirable nobility.

- The sentences are constructed in a dignified manner which use the smallest possible number of words to express ideas of utmost richness.
- The brevity of expression, the conciseness, attains such a striking clearness that men of ordinary intelligence can understand the Qur'an without difficulty.
- And at the same time there is such a profundity, flexibility, suggestiveness and radiance in the Qur'an that it serves as the basis of the principles and rules for the Islamic sciences and arts, for theology and for the juridical school. Then it is almost impossible in each case to express the idea of a text by one interpretation only, either in Arabic or in a foreign language, even with the greatest care.
- Quranic speech appears to be superhuman in its transcendence of the psychological law that intellect and feelings are always found in inverse proportion to each other. In the Qur'an we find constant cooperation between the two antagonistic powers of reason and emotion, for in the narrations, arguments, doctrines, laws and principles, the words have both a persuasive teaching and an emotive force. The speech throughout the Qur'an maintains a wonderful solemnity and powerful majesty which nothing can disturb.
- Finally, when we pass from the structure of a sentence or a group of sentences dealing with the same object, to the structure of the *surah* and of the Qur'an as a whole, we find an overall plan which could not have been created by man.

Expansion of Islam is yet another proof of the Divine character of the Book. As the well-known author and philosopher Frithjof Schuon says: "The supernatural character of the Book does not lie only in its doctrinal content, its psychological and mystical truth and its transmuting magic, it also appears equally in its most exterior efficacy in the miracle of the expansion of Islam.

Manner of presentation and variety of subjects

Its manner of presentation is simple and direct. It employs no artifice or conventional pose. Its appeal is to the intellect of man, his feelings and imagination. It draws lessons from the daily experience of man's life, yet it speaks tersely and covers a multitude of subjects. In the anecdotes of the prophets of different ages and nations and in the accounts of earlier revelations, it covers the period from the beginning of creation to the Last Day of Judgment and the Life Beyond. It discusses the forces of nature, the creation of man, the history of past nations, their beliefs and conduct. It exhorts man to observe the ancient sites and remains of earlier civilizations and discusses metaphysical relations between man and God.

The Qur'an gives insight into some natural phenomena about which man knew nothing until then. These indications correspond precisely with scientific discoveries. To give a few illustrations: it alludes to the sphericity and revolution of the earth (39:5) and describes the formation of rain (30:48); fertilization by the wind (15:22); the revolution of sun, moon and planets in their fixed orbits (36:29-38); the aquatic origin of all living creatures (21:30); the duality in the sex of plants and other creatures (36:35); the collective life of animals (6:38); the mode of life of bees (16:69); and the successive phases of the child in the mother's womb (22:5:23:14). Yet its purpose is not to teach either astronomy or history or philosophy or the physical sciences.

Main Subject and Central Theme

Its subject is Man -- to tell him what is really good for him and what is bad for him. Its central theme converges on the fact that in the realm of beliefs and some eternal truths, man has misled himself by following his desires, conjectures and conclusions based on superficial observation and that the Right Path is the one which God revealed to man at the time of his creation. The same path has been pointed out to him again and again by the prophets in all the ages. The main purpose of the Qur'an is to invite man to return to the path of Guidance, the correct way of life.

The Qur'an never deviates from these cardinal subjects and purposes. Every subject discussed in the Qur'an is related to these basic objects. Exhortation to observe and study the forces of nature, to reflect upon his own creation, to study and draw lessons from the history of past nations and civilizations are all calculated to disclose to man his errors, to remove his misgivings, to reveal eternal truths and to strengthen his conviction in these truths.

Some of its stories and sayings may appear to the casual reader as incoherent or incomprehensible in places and the Qur'an may appear repetitive or even obscure at places. The obscurities disappear, the incomprehension is replaced by clarity and the usefulness and purpose of repetitions is evident if one were to have an idea of the chronological order of the verses and *surahs* and to ponder over the deducible lessons from the repetition of the anecdotes.

Chronological order

The Qur'an is not a book in the sense that it might have been revealed and presented in one volume and it is not a historical record of events arranged in their sequence. The Qur'an was revealed in fragments of varying lengths over a twenty-three year period, a period of stress and conflict, and every text was not only related to the overall plan but also to emerging situations. As each text appeared, it was properly arranged, assigned a number among the verses and that position was never altered. For each verse there are, thus, two orders -- a chronological order and a structural order.

In the chronological order, every verse would meet with the requirement of the time and was dovetailed with the preceding and subsequent verses in the gradual development of the entire plan of the scripture. This is how the plan unfolded itself. A man was selected in the land of Arabs to receive the mantle of prophethood. The Revelation begins with the simple command "*Read*" (96:1), then goes to the apostolic charge "*Preach*" (74:2); then it asks him to call his near relatives (26:214); the call is then extended to the whole town (6:92) and finally to all of mankind (21:107).

The preaching was to be done in stages:

(i) The Prophet was taught how to train himself for his great mission.

(ii) Preliminary information was given to him about eternal truths, along with a convincing refutation of disbelief, erroneous notions, myths and superstitions which prevailed in that society.

(iii) Then came the exposition of basic tenets of morality and a directive to invite all people to the right path.

In the beginning the revelations appeared in short, brilliant, awe-inspiring, lucid and melodious verses which could capture man's heart and soul and compel attention. Though universal truths were being revealed, they were based on examples and observations readily available. The daily facts of life of the Meccans, their own history and traditions, and their moral and social weaknesses were presented before them and they were cautioned about them.

A few were interested but the great majority paid no heed. Some just smiled and refused to take any serious notice. Others resorted to gibes and mockery. Some took the revelations to be the utterings of a soothsayer, or of a mad or possessed person. When the appearance of the revelations continued and began to cause stir in the society, people were alarmed. Opposition erupted and there was combination of forces to curb the new movement. The opposition grew more and more stern as the movement gained momentum. Every weapon was employed in the process -- false propaganda, slander, the economic and social boycott of believers, persecution and finally violence.

In this long and critical period God was sending the revelations in eloquent verses like waves and the gushing of a flood. In these sermons the believers were taught their elementary duties and obligations, they were given lessons in piety, high standards of morality and sublimity of conduct. Social and collective consciousness was aroused among them. They were inspired to strive in the way of God with zeal, fervour and perseverance and were prepared to face all difficulties and tribulations. They were encouraged by the promise of success in this world and eternal bliss in the Life Beyond. At the same time, the opponents and diehards were warned to remember the fate of past but familiar nations and tribes and the vividly described terror of Hell and the Day of Resurrection. Their evil ways, superstitious cults, opposition to eternal truths and animus towards the believers were denounced. Basic truths of culture and civilization and high morality were presented before them. Arguments for belief in the Oneness of God and the Life Hereafter were taken and advanced from daily facts of life and natural phenomena. Disbelief, association of partners with God, denial of the Day of Judgment, traditional beliefs and claims of complete autonomy were strongly refuted.

When the opposition turned into hostility and the movement could make any further headway, the Prophet with his band of followers migrated to the more congenial city of Medina. Almost overnight the foundations of a State were laid. It was confronted with planned and violent attacks. A new group of hypocrites had arisen who wanted to cripple the movement from within. They had to be reckoned with.

The hearts of the believers were strengthened by reciting to them repeatedly the struggles, fortitude, steadfastness and devotions of the earlier prophets. These anecdotes constitute positive lessons for all time. Then again, these accounts only appear repetitive with a cursory reading. A closer analysis reveals that, more often than not, different aspects of the stories have been described at different places to yield new inferences.

After ten years of hard struggle this new religion had spread to the farthest corner of the country. Various stages had to be passed before this was achieved and the texts corresponded with the requirements of every stage. In the Meccan *surahs* the fundamental basis and principles of theology were laid down. With the organisation of the State in the Medinian period came longer *surahs* containing a codified application of those

general principles which laid down the Code of Islam -- a religious, social, civil, military, commercial, judicial, moral, penal and political code, in short, containing all the elements of a perfect code.

The Qur'an predicted the various stages through which the Islamic movement would pass (*surah* 44). It even predicted the reaction of its opponents, i.e., how in the beginning they would be heedless and then agreeable and interested to finally being opposed and hostile. It predicted the defeat of the Meccans in their first pitched encounter with the Muslims (44: 9-16). It announced in advance the triumph of Islam, the permanence of its doctrine, the growth of the young State and the utter inability of any earthly power to annihilate Islam. (13:18; 14:24; 24:55, 8:36).

Thus we will see that nothing is improvised in the Qur'an. Everything was foreseen in every detail from the beginning to the end including the accomplishment of the mission and the death of the Prophet. Every detail would serve as integral part of a flawless and complete plan. As Muhammad Abd Allah Draz asks, "Who could have formed and carried out such a complete plan? Who other than God from whom came the heavenly mission?"

Structural Plan

By its very nature, the chronological order of the verses and *surahs* could not serve as the plan of the written scripture for all time. For the message of Islam to be spread to all the corners of the globe, it would not have been a wise plan to start the scripture with the words '*Read*' or '*Preach*' or to invite the near relatives or to discuss the weaknesses and evils of Meccan society, its cults and superstitions or to give a jolt to the people and warn them of the torments and punishments of Hell or the gravity of Day of Judgment without first telling them what Islam is, what it stands for, what are its doctrines and principles, and what is way of life does it propound and what is its legislative basis.

In its structural plan, the Qur'an starts, after the *Al-Fatiha*, with the mystic words *Alif Lam Mim* and then says,

> "*This is the scripture whereof there is no doubt; a Guidance unto those who ward off (evil); who believe in the Unseen, and establish worship, and spend of that We have bestowed upon them; and who believe in that which is revealed unto thee (Muhammad) and that which was revealed before thee, and are certain of the Hereafter. These depend on guidance from their Lord. These are the successful*." [Qur'an 2:1-5]

Then it goes on to describe different types of disbelievers: those who are confirmed disbelievers who would not listen in any circumstances and nothing can redeem them; or those who profess to believe in God and the Last Day while they do not actually believe; those who make mischief on the earth even while pretending to be peace-makers; to those who are hypocrites and purchase error at the price of guidance. These opening passages present the fundamental doctrine of Islam in a nutshell. The different types of disbelief are taken into account and immediately after comes the clarion call.

> *O mankind! worship your Lord, Who hath created you and those before you, so that ye may ward off (evil). Who hath appointed the earth a resting-place for you, and the sky a canopy; and causeth water to pour down from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you. And do not set up rivals to Allah when ye know (better)*. [Qur'an 2: 21-22]

This is followed by confirmation of the Divine origin of the Qur'an and a challenge to those who doubt it:

> *And if ye are in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto our slave (Muhammad), then produce a surah of the like thereof, and call your witnesses besides Allah if ye are truthful. And if ye do it not, and ye can never do it, then guard yourselves against the Fire prepared for disbelievers, whose fuel is of men and stones.* [Qur'an 2:23-24]

A full exposition of the doctrines, principles and ideas contained in these opening passages alone can cover volumes. Can there be a more striking, more beautiful and artistic, more masterly and perfect, more meaningful and profound beginning to the scripture? And the same superb and perfect plan runs throughout the scripture in its structural arrangement.

To quote Muhammad Abd Allah Draz again "The very texts which follow in chronological order and the most wise educational plan were taken from their historical positions and fixed in their architectural order, every one in a definite frame already built to receive it, taking its place in those units of different lengths called *surahs*. What makes it so wonderful is that once each *surah* is completed from those scattered parts, it is a unit faultlessly formed artistically, linguistically and logically. A special musical rhythm runs equally through

all parts of the speech; there is a common harmonious style and a logical plan in the development of the ideas expressed." There is a sequence, harmony, rhythm and logical development in the verses that are placed in chronological order. An equally striking sequence, harmony, rhythm and logical development has again emerged in the entirely different structural order. And if we remember that there are 114*surahs* in the Qur'an and many of them were revealed piecemeal at intervals of several years, nothing but amazement overtakes us.

"It is clear that to establish such a scheme in advance, the author would have had to foresee not only the problems which would arise from the events of the next twenty-three years and their solutions, but also the literary form, the musical tone and rhythm in which it would be expressed, the appropriate structure for all the revelations yet to come and the precise spot in that framework where each revelation would be fixed. Only the Divine Omniscience could be the creator of the Qur'an."

This structural plan was not devised at a later date. It was laid down by the Prophet himself under inspiration from God. He used to recite the whole Qur'an during the month of Ramadan and a large number of followers had memorized it.

The modernist's approach

Without realizing the beauty, grandeur and significance of the structural plan, a few modernists have advocated rearranging of the Qur'an in chronological order. A few isolated attempts have been made here and there but they were doomed to fail. After all God has guaranteed protection of the Qur'an (15 :9) and that protection not only covers its text but also its arrangement. These modernists are like those who make an attempt to rediscover in the Qur'an the results of modern researches or to support the divine statements by the present state of science. Without being scientists themselves, they try to develop scientific theories on the basis of isolated scientific evidence. A few go to the ridiculous limit of equating Jinns with microbes or to hold them as creatures of fantasy who are mentioned in the Qur'an because the pagans believed in them. Their attempts to get round the whole *surah Jinn* and such verses as '*We have not created men and Jinn except for worship*' are most amusing. They do not realize that it is not the purpose of the Qur'an to teach science or to give scientific explanations of the forces of nature. The purpose of these indications is to urge man to ponder over the creation, to study physical laws using his intellect and to draw his attention (to his own advantage) to the might and wisdom of the Creator. It is for strengthening his conviction that the Qur'an appeals to man's intellectual faculties and repeatedly urges him to take note of natural phenomenon. (2:159-164; 3:182-190; 10:6,16:67- 68; 45:415).

Miracles in the Qur'an

There is another group, although extremely small, of ultra-modernists who try to give rational explanations to the various miracles mentioned in the Qur'an. They forget that the greatest miracle is the Qur'an itself. As an eminent writer puts it, "Everything proves it -- its style, its contents, its constant conformity with the past, present and future events -- its transcendent character which never shows a trace of a particular man, of any one society or epoch of history or specific region of the globe. It is not a passing event in history -- it is unchangeable and eternally present for the admiring contemplation of all men. It is the truth, the truth which proves itself and while it appeals to reason it transcends reason and thus shows its Divine origin." Apart from this great miracle, several miracles, as understood in the general sense, are mentioned in the Qur'an. For example:

- The Prophet's journey by supernatural means from Mecca to Jerusalem in a single moment of the night. (17:1) .
- The cleavage on the surface of the moon. (54:1)
- The miraculous victory over the army of Meccans by a small number of the faithful. (8:17)
- The disclosure by the Prophet of secret facts which had been carefully hidden from his knowledge. (4: 113; 66: 3)

Some miracles performed by earlier prophets are also mentioned like Moses' palm of dazzling brightness, his transformation of a stick into a living snake, Abraham's miraculous escape from the fire into which he was thrown and revival of the dead by Jesus.

As the Qur'an ushered an era of reason, it based its arguments on observations, reflection and intellect rather than on miracles. Generally the Prophet refused to accede to the importunate demands of the people to produce miracles:

> *And they say: We will not put faith in thee till thou cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us; Or thou have a garden of date-palms and grapes, and cause rivers to gush forth therein abundantly; Or thou cause the heaven to fall upon us piecemeal, as thou hast pretended, or bring Allah and the angels as a warrant; Or thou have a house of gold; or*

> *thou ascend up into heaven, and even then we will put no faith in thine ascension till thou bring down for us a book that we can read.* [Qur'an 17:90-93]

> *And they say: Why are not portents sent down upon him from his Lord? Say: Portents are with Allah only, and I am but a plain warner. Is it not enough for them that We have sent down unto thee the Scripture which is read unto them? Lo! herein verily is mercy, and a reminder for folk who believe. Is it not enough for them that We have sent down unto thee the Scripture which is read unto them? Lo! herein verily is mercy, and a reminder for folk who believe.* [Qur'an 29:50-51]

In that age people demanded production of miracles as proof of apostleship. Now some people fight shy of them and pass over them as incredible. The scripture is for all times. It was not meant to oblige the people of that age or the people of this age.

It is necessary to understand what is meant by a miracle. In Islamic terminology a miracle is generally defined as 'a fact contrary to general rules, opposed to the normal course of events, with a cause which escapes human comprehension and this fact is also a challenge to anyone who doubts it.' Miracles, whether they be material or spiritual in character, are not of human origin, for they fall exclusively within God's domain and competence. He alone overcomes physical laws whenever He chooses to do so in order to prove the Divine origin of the messages that the prophets transmit or such other purpose as He deems fit. We cannot deny to the author of physical laws the competence to override physical law. As for the prophets, they were as much governed by physical laws like other human beings except to the extent that God gave them supernatural powers. It was not for them to demand a miracle or substitute one with another of their preference. As the Qur'an says:

> *And verily We sent messengers (to mankind) before thee, and We appointed for them wives and offspring and it was not (given) to any messenger that he should bring a sign save by Allah's leave.* [Qur'an 13:38]

To each epoch, its book.

In recent history many a saint produced lesser miracles known as *karamat*. They too did so under the authority of God, who alone is the Master of the supernatural. Yet some modern interpreters of the Qur'an stretch the plain meanings of the verses to give pseudo-rational explanations!

Prophecies

The Qur'an has made a number of predictions as well. Some of them have been mentioned in the foregoing pages. It also predicted the eternal schism in Christianity (5:14); the dispersion of the Israelites (7:168); their persecution until the end of the world (7:167), and the domination of the Christians over the Jews till the end of the world (3:55).

Not only have the predictions of the Qur'an come true, but the Qur'an asserts that nothing can ever contradict its statements (41:42). Who could ever give guarantees against space and time other than the Master of space and time Himself?

Historical approach

The Qur'an narrates some events in the lives of the earlier prophets and the fate of those nations which did not heed their warnings. These accounts are intended to reinforce the purpose of the present revelation, by letting people draw lessons from past history. No chronological sequence in the description of the events is maintained. Only the most significant facts are mentioned and the scenes then change with amazing rapidity. Historical details are not considered relevant for the lessons of history, for historiography is not the main objective. In order to focus attention on guidance, the Qur'an often keeps historical details vague, for example, "*or like him who passed by a town* . . ." in (12:261). In *surah* 54:18-21, nothing is told of the families, the houses etc. of the *Adites*, or of the dispute between Hud and his people but chastisement is highlighted and it is described in a manner which arouses vivid emotions. As a consequence of this, the time of action as well as the character of the figures often go into the background in favour of the Quranic message.

Another method which the Qur'an adopts in preaching is the 'actualization of the past' to stir the hearts of its listeners. Thus in 2:47-49, the People of the Book are reminded of the mercy and bounty of God which was granted to them long ago. It is done with a tense that shifts from the past to the present as if the events concerned the present listeners rather than their forefathers. Also at times the opposite method is adopted. In 14:21-22, the description of the Hereafter is put in the perfect tense instead of the future apparently to shake up the people of the day. And not only do Quranic tales appear to be configured after the conditions and purpose of the message at the moment of

delivery, but also occasionally a certain detail concerning a former prophet reflects a certain event which befell the Arabian messenger. An instance of this is the caution which Moses received in *surah* 18:19-20. "*The Chiefs are consulting together to kill you*." At this time, there was a conspiracy to kill the Prophet.

It has to be remembered that the narrative content of the Qur'an depicts all the vicissitudes of the soul from the time of creation to that of resurrection of man and the World Beyond. "The tales in the Qur'an are enacted daily in our souls. The Qur'an is like a picture of everything the human brain can feel and think, and it is by this means that God dissipates human disquiet, infusing into the believer silence, serenity and peace.

Doctrinal Content and Basic Concepts

The Qur'an describes itself as 'discernment' (*furqan*) between truth and error. Its whole content is summed up in these words:

> *Truth has come and error has vanished: verily error is ephemeral*. [Qur'an 27:73]

The purpose of the Qur'an is to expound the truth of the Absolute. "It is in essence the Truth and the Law. It sets out to abolish both uncertainty and hesitation, in other words both error and sin; error in holding that there is no Absolute or that it is relative or there can be more than one Absolute or the relative is the Absolute and sin is placing these errors on the level of the will or action. These two doctrines of the Absolute and of man are respectively to be found in the two testimonies of the Islamic faith, the first (*La ilaha illa Allah*) concerning God and the second (*Muhammadun' rasul u'llah*) concerning the Prophet. In its doctrinal content the whole of the Qur'an is a sort of multiple paraphrase of the fundamental discernment expressed by the *Shahada* (testimony) -- There is no divinity (or reality or absolute) outside the only Divinity (or Reality or Absolute) and Muhammad (the glorified, the perfect) is the Envoy of the Divinity." (Frithjof Schuon *Understanding Islam)*

The Oneness of God

The most fundamental doctrine of the Qur'an is belief in the Oneness of God. The Qur'an says that belief in the existence of God is ingrained in man's very nature. The first vision afforded to man was the vision of God. Man was also made conscious of the purpose of creation and of the '*names*' or *meaning of things* and of the laws of their existence. It is against his nature to reflect on the working of the Universe and yet deny the existence of an all-embracing Providence. The Qur'an addresses human nature and invites an answer from its very depths.

> *Say: Who supplieth you sustenance from the heaven and the earth? Who hath power over hearing and sight? And who bringeth forth the living from the dead, and bringeth forth the dead from the living. And who rules over all things? They will surely say: 'God.' Will ye not therefore mind Him?* [Qur'an 10:32-33]

If he ever denies the existence of God in his indifference, arrogance or pedantry, his very nature is an argument against himself.

> *Nay, man is a telling witness against himself although he tenders excuses*. [Qur'an 75:14-15]

The plan, the harmony and the balance in the Universe with all its forces and physical laws announce to everyone willing to hear that there is a Supreme Creative Power, the Lord of the Universe, God Almighty who governs the Universe. It is for this reason that the Qur'an states:

> *In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships that sail in the sea with that which profit men, and the water that Allah sends down from the clouds, then gives life with it to the earth after its death, and spreads in it all kinds of animals, the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between the heaven and the earth -- these are signs for a people who understand.* [Qur'an 2:169]

On Earth are signs for mean of firm belief, also in your own selves; Will ye not then behold them? [Qur'an 51:20-21]

The innumerable references made in the Qur'an to the diverse aspects of providence, to the means of life provided to every object in the Universe, to the immutability of the Laws of Nature, to the plan, harmony, proportion and perfection in nature form the basis of the Quranic argument in support of the unity of God.

The Qur'an points out that there is universal belief that there is but one Creator and Administrator of the Universe (43:9) but the polytheists mistakenly associate secondary gods as capable of interceding on their behalf with Him and winning His favours. When creation and

providence are attributes exclusive to God, how can one equate the creature to the Creator, asks the Qur'an. Is it conceivable that a being which has created nothing equals the One who has created everything? (16:17). Is it not illogical to invoke that which never answers us, which never hears us? (46:5). Is it not being ungrateful to forget the Benefactor who grants us our happiness, the Benefactor to whom we address all our supplications in times of distress? (30: 8). Is it not ungratefulness to associate others with Him who are incapable of either good or evil action? (16:53-54). Had there been multiplicity of gods, would not have the creation been overturned by competition among such powerful authorities? (21:21) And finally those polytheists who believe that any man, or saint or other being has the power of mediation, or intercession with God Almighty must prove their assertions (2:225; 13:33; 39: 3).
The Qur'an also points to the unanimous testimony of the prophets.

> *There has not been one prophet to whom We have not revealed the truth that there is no God but Me; therefore worship Me.* [Qur'an 21:25].

The Qur'an not only stresses in the most effective manner the Oneness of God, it also enables us to have a glimpse of the splendour of divine attributes. Possessing a finite intellect and limited perception, man cannot comprehend the Absolute. "The peculiarity of the Qur'an is that it lifts the veils of anthropomorphic similitudes from across the vision of God and allows us to take a transcendental view of Him in His attributes." (Abul Kalam Azad, *Basic Concepts of Qur'an*)

The Qur'an sweeps aside all distinctions between the common people and the elite in forming a vision of God. To everyone it presents but a single way of approach to God and a single view of divine attributes. It affirms individual attributes but does not allow any attribute to receive an anthropomorphic touch.

Sovereignty of God

The Qur'an says there is a definite Law of the Universe -- a universal Divine Government or Will of God or *Sunnat-ul-Allah --* governing and supporting the multitudinous objects, forces and creatures in the Universe. Everything is according to a well-conceived universal plan with perfect proportion, harmony and balance in the creation and there is no blind play of forces without consciousness and purpose.

> *Blessed be God in whose hands is the kingdom of the creations; and who has control over all things; He who created death and life, that, He may test which of you is best in deeds. God is most Exalted in Might and oft-Forgiving.* [Qur'an 67: 1-2]

God is omnipotent and everything is utterly dependent upon Him. Yet in His infinite mercy He has endowed man with a free personality and created everything for the service of man. " . . . *whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth is His.*

All are subservient unto Him."[Qur'an 2:116]

It is this free personality, the freedom of conscious behaviour which calls for endeavour on man's part to avoid pitfalls and disasters.

> *And say: The Truth is from your Lord, let him then who care to, believe; and let him who will not care to believe not. And if ye do well to your own good will e do so, and if ye do evil, against your own harm will ye do so. No soul earns but for itself and no bearer of burden has to bear the burden of another*. [Qur'an 6:164]

Every soul is held in pledge for its deeds. [Qur'an 74:38]

There are also a number of verses of determinist purport. But freedom of will is not incompatible with predestination. Man is subject to predestination because he is not God and he is free because God has willed so. To deny predestination would amount to saying that God is not aware of events in advance and is not omniscient.

A question is often raised: if God is all powerful, why does He not abolish the ills from which creatures suffer. The reason is that Omnipotence is not the only attribute which governs this Universe. Other attributes governing creation and laws of creation also come into play. Man has been given intelligence and will. If God were to abolish all evil which is nothing by itself but a relativity, the free personality of man will be eliminated and this would not be in accord with the purpose of creation. "To speak of the world is to speak of relativity, of the deployment of relatives, of differentiation and of the presence of evil; since the world is not God, it must include imperfection, otherwise it would be reduced to God and thus cease to exist." (Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*)

Living Sense of God

It is the purpose of the Qur'an to engender in man's mind a living sense of God. Howsoever transcendental, God is intensely real and approachable and is not a vague, distant or amorphous being or logical abstraction. He is closer to man than his jugular vein (50: 15); three persons speak not privately together but He is their fourth, nor five but He is their sixth, nor fewer, nor more but wherever they be He is with them. (58: 8). The humblest of His servants can approach Him for fulfilment of his wishes, and aspiration, for contentment of his mind, for his protection and safety and for God's grace, mercy, bounty and forgiveness and guidance without the aid of any intercessor.

> *O Muhammad: When my servants ask thee about Me, say: I am indeed near at hand. I respond to the prayer of every supplicant when he invokes My help. Let them also reciprocate to My call, and believe in Me, that they may become righteous*. [Qur'an 2:186]

The Qur'an asks man to treat life as a gift from God, a sacred trust and a privilege to be lived in the presence of 'Divine Countenance' and to be guided by its light. He has been given the ability to recognize moral values and to distinguish between right and wrong and he should always be conscious of his moral responsibility in everything he does, be it great or small. "Mere philosophic perception of essence of Divinity or contemplation is barren if it does not generate volition or give movement to human life in consonance with the qualities or attributes of that essence." (Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*) "The main purpose of the Qur'an," points out Sir Muhammad Iqbal, "is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and the Universe."

Prophet and Revelations

Man has been given the faculty to think, know and understand, to distinguish between right and wrong and to exercise his will. He has been given a sort of autonomy but he has not been made wholly independent. As God took care of his physical and material wants and made provisions for everything in abundance. He took care of his spiritual development and sent down Revelations through His chosen servants and Envoys indicating to him the true path of guidance. Man was not abandoned to his natural intelligence which was bound to be evolutionary and conflicting. Reason and revelation are not antipodal [opposites] but are complementary to one another. As Paul Tillich said, "Reason does not resist revelation. It asks for revelation, for revelation means the reintegration of reason." Or as Parvez says in *Ma'arif*, "Since man is something more than a physical and empirical world, it is incumbent on him to get acquainted with life's mystery . . . And this is not possible without light gained from outside, which surpasses reason . . . Reason takes a fragmentary view of life. But a mind enlightened by revelation sees the reality of an undivided life. The prophet creates that new world of life's self-revelation and individuals, enlightened by the light of revelation, partake in that reality." (Baljon, *Modern Muslim Qur'an Interpretation*)

These revelations were not just inspirations, they were the verbatim message of God conveyed through spiritual agents called angels. The revelations which came in different ages and to different people were in essence one and the same. There was no doubt gradual evolution of the Code or *Shar'iah* they embodied in accordance with the stage of development of man, but the fundamental doctrines they presented were one and the same, i.e., submission to God, in other words, Islam. The Qur'an enjoins belief in all the revelations and in all the prophets:

> *Those who wish to separate God from his messengers, those who believe in some and do not believe in others, they are the real infidels and We have prepared for the infidels a terrible doom.* [Qur'an 4:150-151]

Muslims are those "who believe in what has been bestowed upon thee (Muhammad) and what was bestowed aforetime." The Qur'an affirms all the earlier revelations and has preciously preserved the previous teaching but it is not just a synthesis of those teachings. "It marks out its own way by a spontaneous impulse. While it preserves the religious and moral patrimony, it adorns it more, crowning the divine building on which all the prophets have collaborated." (Muhammad Abd Allah Draz, *Islam the Straight Path*). The Qur'an does not, however, identify itself with or support the present state of other religions or scriptures. It emphatically states that prophets were neither God, nor His images or incarnations nor His sons. They were merely men like other men, but highly gifted and innocent who were chosen by God to transmit His message and to guide the erring humanity. By themselves they had no control over anything in the creation of God nor did they possess by themselves any supernatural powers. For himself, the Prophet of Islam declared in the Quranic verse, "*Say (O Prophet) that I am a man like you; I am nothing but a*

man and a messenger." (18:110; 41:6) And the same was true of all the prophets. "*O prophets :Ye are but of one order*." (23:54) In its unitary and transcendental concept of God, the Qur'an is definite and inelastic and refuses to enter into compromises in matters of belief. The double testimony or *Shahada* has been made the basic doctrine of Islam with a view to prevent the Prophet from being ever treated as God or His incarnation or to e invested with attributes and honour exclusive to God. The Qur'an preaches toleration towards people of other faiths and asks its followers to seek *modus vivendi* with others but unequivocally it declares that Islam is the only religion acceptable to God.

> *Lo ! religion with God is Islam.* [Qur'an 3:19]

> *And who seeketh a religion other than Islam, it will not be acceptable from him.* [Qur'an 3:85]

It insists upon strength of belief and integrity of thought for without that no edifice can stand. At the same time, it makes it clear that there is no compulsion in religion (2: 256); that the believers should,

> "*Enter into the era of universal peace; and follow not the footsteps of the evil one, for he is to you an avowed enemy*." [Qur'an 2:208]

Life Hereafter

Another fundamental doctrine of Qur'an is the belief in life after death. It addressed those who doubted resurrection, along with a host of other verses, in the following verse :

> *O mankind! if ye are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make (it) clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (give you growth) that ye attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dieth (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he knoweth naught. And thou (Muhammad) seest the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it doth thrill and swell and put forth every lovely kind (of growth). That is because Allah, He is the Truth and because He quickeneth the dead, and because He is Able to do all things; And because the Hour will come, there is no doubt thereof; and because Allah will raise those who are in the graves*. [Qur'an 22:5-7]

The life in this world is not an end in itself but is an organic stage of the eternal life and disappears to assume a higher form:

> *Your creation and resurrection are but as (the creation and raising of) a single soul*. [Qur'an 41:27]
> *And surely from state to state shall ye be carried.* [Qur'an 84:19]

This life is ephemeral no doubt but it has a tremendous instrumental value. In fact, it is the key to the life hereafter. The earth is a testing ground and upon the achievements of this life will depend whether a man will enjoy eternal bliss "**what no eye hath seen and nor ear hath heard nor mind of men hath conceived**" (Muslim, *Kitabul Qiamat*) or terrible agony, anguish and damnation in Hell.

The Qur'an uses a number of similes and metaphors to describe the eternal bliss of heaven and the terrible agony of hell, but in this earthly life, none can form even remotely a precise idea of that bliss or agony.

> *Those who believe and do right, joy is for them and bliss their journey's end. What will convey to them what the consuming Fire (Hell), is; it is the fire kindled by God which leapeth over the hearts.* [Qur'an 104:5-7]

The cardinal principle of this life according to Qur'an is its accountability in the Hereafter. That alone gives it meaning and purpose. The reaction of one's deeds are effectively imprinted on one's soul to be carried to the Life Beyond.

> *And every man's deeds have We fastened about his neck. And on the Day of Resurrection will We bring forth to him a book which shall be preferred to him wide open; 'Read thy book; there needeth none but thyself to make an account against thee this day*. [Qur'an 17:13-14]

Resurrection and life after death are as certain and inevitable as the life of this world. Resurrection is

certain because God has promised it; it is certain because justice and wisdom demand it for sake of just retribution for one's deeds. Or as Frithjof Schuon says, "One proof of immortality of the soul -- which is essentially intelligence or consciousness -- is that the soul could not have an end beneath itself, in other words matter or the mental reflection of matter. The higher cannot be merely a function of the lower, it cannot be only a means in relation to what it surpasses."

The Qur'an makes it clear that this Universe has not been created for pastime nor is the life of this world a mere accident. Says the Qur'an, "*What! Deemed ye then that We created you for naught and that ye would not be brought back to Us."* [Qur'an 23:117]

Having been created in the 'best of moulds' and as the highest form of Creation, man has not been created just to live for a few moments and then become completely annihilated. On the contrary, earthly life has a definite purpose to serve and a goal towards which it has to move. And that goal is the 'Life Hereafter.'

Unity of Mankind

"*It is He Who created you from a single person . . .*" says the Qur'an (7:189). It asks men to remember that 'all mankind was at first but one community,' that it was only subsequently that it stood divided and that it should be man's endeavour to restore its unity (10:19; 2:208). This concept of unity of human origin rests and receives life and sustenance from the concept of Unity of God.

The Qur'an brushes aside all distinctions of race and colour and every hierarchical conception of life, social or political. It restores dignity to man by placing him next to God and recognizes only righteousness as the criterion of superiority of one over the other. The Qur'an favours a world order and universal brotherhood.

> *Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher:* [Qur'an 21:92]

The Prophet transformed that idea into an active reality in the life of his followers. He treated mankind as the '**family of God**,' a '**fold every member of which is a keeper or shepherd unto every other**.'

"**All creatures of God are His family, and he is the most beloved of God who loveth best His creatures.**" (Baihaqi, *Kitabul Iman,* Vol. III, p. 505)

Code of Life

Islam is not only a spiritual attitude of mind or a code of sublime precepts but it is also a self-sufficient orbit of culture and a social system of well-defined features. The Qur'an not only prescribes beliefs and defines the metaphysical relation between man and his Creator but it also lays down rules of personal conduct and social behaviour. Belief is the basis of the Code of law, and the Code of law is the result of belief, for legislation without belief is like a building without a foundation -- and belief without a code of law to put it into effect would be merely theoretical and ineffective. It offers a complete coordination of the spiritual and material aspects of life, lays down a simple and practical code and demands a righteousness well within the realm of practicability. Its concept of life does not exclude notions of happiness in the shape of material welfare. It demands no renunciation of the world nor does it prescribe austerities for spiritual purification. Its concept is based on the principle:

> *Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter*. [Qur'an 2:201]

At the same time, it does not subscribe to materialistic trends but rouses in man a consciousness of his moral responsibility. There is no sphere of life, no conscious activity which may be outside the pale of its morality. If it falls in line with the Divine prescriptions and the moral code almost every temporal act assumes a spiritual touch and is raised to the status of worship attracting reward or pleasure of God.

The injunctions that the Qur'an lays down are endorsed both by reason and experience. They constitute a system of channels divinely predisposed for the equilibrium of man's volitional life and this equilibrium far from being an end in itself is, on the contrary, in the final analysis, only a basis of escaping, in peace-giving and liberating contemplation of the Immutable, from the uncertainties and turbulence of the ego.

According to the Qur'an, man has a dual responsibility to discharge. One is in relation to himself and the other is in relation to his external world. The one is to acknowledge in thought and action what is styled as *Haquq Allah* or the rights of God. The other is to acknowledge equally well, *Haquq-al-'Ibad* or *Haquq-an-Nas* or the rights of the external world of creation. The former has to express itself in a process of self-development -- physical, intellectual and spiritual. In other words, man's primary responsibility is to invite God, so to speak, to exercise His right to dwell in the individual and urge him to use properly the balance set in his nature. The idea is in conformity with the Quranic exhortation, "*If ye help Allah, He will help you and will make your foothold firm.*" [Qur'an 47:7]

The other responsibility lies in developing a social conscience and in caring for the welfare of others. The

two types of responsibilities are not to be regarded as exclusive. They are merely two aspects of one and the same attitude towards life, of the same activity proceeding from it and signify the character of the mind one has to develop. The discharge of these responsibilities is aided by certain disciplines which are divided into two categories -- prescribed disciplines or the so-called pillars of Islam and self-discipline embodying the ethical code. If any one thinks that he can develop his personality and raise himself in the scale of spiritual development without subjecting himself to these disciplines he is very much deluding himself.

Discharge of this dual responsibility is *khair* (good), and failure to do is *sharr* (evil). The distinction is to be upheld in every sphere of life's activity -- physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, economic and political. "The personal virtues of kindliness, purity, chastity, love, affection, truth, respect for covenants, forbearance, forgiveness, trustworthiness, justice, mercy and the like are not mere luxuries to be indulged in at convenience but are indispensable for a righteous living. And the opposite qualities such as hate, cruelty, indecency, fornication, adultery, dishonesty, falsehood, treachery, hypocrisy, spite, defection, unfaithfulness and exploitation of the weak which work for the disintegration of society are not only vices, but positives sins in Islam, and are therefore not merely to be strenuously avoided but firmly discountenanced." (Syed Abdul Latif, *The Mind the al-Qur'an Builds*)

It will thus be seen that Islam is the path of devotion, of the strenuous struggle with evil and of surrendering one's will to the supreme will of God and of devoting one's talent to serve the highest in life.

The culture and civilization generated by Islam are but expressions of these directives and principles. Dr. Latif says that the culture of Islam does not tolerate the whimsical fashions of the day, (primarily in outward show or dress), nor does it tolerate the putting on of airs or conspicuous consumption, nor all of the different recreational pursuits which cater to sensual pleasures, neither does it tolerate diverse expressions of 'superiority.' Rather it is much fuller, much more meaningful, having its foundations rest on the eternal and all pervasive spiritual law of life. Likewise, its civilization represents a process of development of human thought and personality to humanize organized civil life and to promote peaceful relations between men on an enduring basis.

> *And, O believers, thus have We made of you a nation justly balanced, that you might be a model for all people, even as the Messenger is a model for you.* [Qur'an 2:143]

Eternal character of the directive principles

It is not that the directive principles of the Qur'an were only good and suited for the requirements of the times in which the Scripture was revealed. They are as good and worthy of application today as they will be in the ages to come. There are some useful trends in the modern world which are in accord with the Quranic principles and Muslims should fall in line with them. In main, these trends are:

(i) Progress of the world towards a democratic order of life for all mankind. This is upheld and promoted by the Qur'an.

(ii) Socialization of the good things of life. Allowing full freedom of initiative and enterprise to increase wealth and to raise the standard of living by all legitimate means, the economic system of the Qur'an aims at socialization. It, however, cautions that the standard of living should not be expressed by self-indulgence or by extravagant material comforts.

(iii) Science discloses to man the hidden forces of nature and presses them into man's service. The persistent call of the Qur'an to man is to ponder the working of the world of creation and to study the laws of the universe. Through their observation, one is expected not to go merely into poetic ecstasy or adoration, but to study and understand the forces and elements of nature to harness them for his use. Then alone can he form a rudimentary idea of the Might, Wisdom, Benevolence and Sovereignty of God. God has subjected everything in the creation to man's use. Would it 'not be ungratefulness on his part it he were to fail to put them to proper use by sheer ignorance. The Qur'an, however, insists that the impersonal power of nature is to be humanized and not to be converted into a destructive engine.

The Qur'an denounces the ills of society and does not support its materialistic trends which exclude spiritual development. It advocates a synthesis between material and spiritual welfare. In fact, its principles provide the only answer to the disquiet and disharmony prevailing in our present-day society.

To quote Frithjof Schuon again, "In the life of the people there are, as it were, two halves: one constitutes the play of its earthly existence and the other its relationship with the Absolute. What determines the value of a civilization is not the literal form of its earthly dream, but its capacity to 'feel' the Absolute. A sense of

the sacred is fundamental for every civilization because the sacred, which is immutable, inviolable and infinitely majestic, is in the very. substance of our spirit and, of our existence. Modern civilization, what with what science and technology have made it, is in inestimable flux . . . The world is sick because men live beneath themselves. The error of modern man is that he wants to reform the world without having either the will or the power to reform man, and this flagrant contradiction, this attempt to make a better world, on the basis of worsening humanity, can only end in the abolition even of what is human, and consequently the abolition of happiness too. Reforming man means re-establishing this broken link and binding him again to the world of the spirit. It means plucking him from the kingdom of passion, from the cult of materialism, and re-integrating him into the world of the spirit and serenity -- even, it might be said, into the world of his own sufficient reason."

The initiative for reform and movement has to come from man. Says the Qur'an:

> *God does not change the conditions of a people unless they first change that which is in their hearts.* [Qur'an 13:12]
> *Man shall have nothing but what he strives for*. [Qur'an 50:40]
> *And whatever suffering ye suffer, it is what your hands have wrought.* [Qur'an 42:29]
> *And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our Paths*. [Qur'an 29:69]

The attitude generated by the Qur'an brooks no frustration or sense of defeatism in life. There can always be ups and downs in this life but failure in any endeavour is not to be allowed to darken one's life. It is to be borne patiently and turned into a moral victory.

> *By the declining day, Lo! man is a state of loss, save those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance*. [Qur'an 103: 1-3]

The Qur'an embraces all of humanity in its fold, raises man to the highest moral and spiritual levels and is an unswerving Guide to the straight path which leads to happiness, in this life and the life to follow.

> *By the soul and Him who balanced it an infused into the same the sense of discrimination and the power of choosing between the wrong and the right, happy is he who keepeth it pure and unhappy is he who corrupteth it.* [Qur'an 91: 7-10]

Let it be clear that this work is not a full translation of the Qur'an but is only a compendium of its translation without attempting to break the sequence of verses or classifying and collecting them, according to their substance, into groups under defined headings and then discussing their meaning or import. All that has been done is to partly compress the meanings of chapters. This abridgment has been attained by generally omitting repetitions, by condensing the accounts of anecdotes of the prophets and giving the gist of verses which have appeared before in full. The translation of verses is not my own but is a selection from the Translations of the Qur'an by Dr. Syed Abdul Latif, Marmaduke Pickthall and Muhammad Asad (part only). At places help has been taken from the commentary, *Tafhimul-Quran*, by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and the commentary of Abdullah Yusuf Ali. The purpose of this book is to highlight the ordinances and teachings of the Qur'an and to give a sketch of its thought-contents in its own words in order to stimulate interest in the reading of the full text and to serve as sure guide in our daily life.

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